

Taser-related death to prompt sweeping changes at Border Services

By Ian Austin

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The Canadian Border Services Agency promised sweeping changes to its treatment of international arrivals Monday as it released its internal report into the Taser-related death of Polish immigrant Robert Dziekanski.

The CBSA promised more cameras, improved interpreter services and the option of more patrols and security checks within the CBSA secure area at Vancouver International Airport, where Dziekanski wandered disoriented for up to nine hours before his death on Oct. 14.



CREDIT: Staff photographer - The Province
The international arrivals terminal at Vancouver International Airport.

The CBSA said it will ensure that people referred for further examinations will report to the secondary examination area within a "reasonable amount of time," and said it would review "services provided for international travellers and those waiting to meet them."

Dziekanski and his mother were separated for hours by a matter of metres, as Dziekanski was on one side of the international arrivals area and his mother waited on the other side.

"I assure you that the CBSA is committed to implementing these recommendations without delay here at Vancouver International Airport and at other international airports as appropriate, to further secure and safely facilitate travellers' entry," said Alain Jolicoeur, president of the CBSA.

The damning report shows that the CBSA lost track of Dziekanski for more than six hours. Dziekanski arrived at 3:20 p.m. on Oct. 13 and was processed through primary inspection at 4:09 p.m.

According to a timeline issued by CBSA, Dziekanski wasn't again identified until 10:40 p.m., when he tried to exit the CBSA hall.

"At that point, a CBSA officer advised him he needed to go to secondary, and directed him toward that area," the report says. "Mr. Dziekanski spoke little or no English and a Polish interpreter was not readily available."

The report also says 4,000 people went through the area during the time Dziekanski was unaccounted for.

Jolicoeur sent his condolences to Dziekanski's family.

"I would like to extend our sincere and deepest sympathies to the family of Mr. Dziekanski," said Jolicoeur. "Our thoughts are with Mr. Dziekanski's family and friends at this difficult time."

Dziekanski, who spoke no English, wandered the halls of the airport for nine hours - principally in the customs area under the jurisdiction of the CBSA - before becoming upset and disoriented.

As documented in a video now seen by millions around the world, four police officers approached Dziekanski, Tasered him, subdued him, and were sitting on him when his heart stopped in the early-morning hours of Oct. 14.

The poignant video, filmed by fellow traveler Paul Pritchard, unleashed an international firestorm and launched more than half a dozen investigations.

The CBSA has come under fire for failing to provide translation services for Dziekanski - who had never been to Canada before and spoke no English - and for apparently being unaware of the fact he had wandered the secure area for hours without anyone seeking him out or attempting to help him.

While the RCMP has been criticized for its reaction to Dziekanski - who the video showed had thrown a computer and a table, but never confronted anyone and at one point walked away with his arms raised in the international symbol for surrender - many feel the situation should never have escalated to that point.

The CBSA apparently did nothing to quell his fears and security simply called police. Within seconds of approaching Dziekanski they fatally Tasered him, despite the fact that four officers may have been able to subdue him without weapons.

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